Understanding perceptions of physical harm among young adults using a geospatial mobile dating app

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Introduction

- Young adults may have increased risk of physical and sexual violence during college years
- Mobile dating apps increase relationship options for young adults
- Mobile dating app features such as matching based on shared contacts, may influence perceptions of how potential dates may result in physical harm

Objective

- Explore perceptions of physical harm among users of a specific mobile dating app and how these risk influence their behaviors

Methods

- Students 18-24 years at a large urban university (N=1,322)
- Online, self-administered survey

Who?

- Tested the association between mobile dating app use and perceptions of harm from other app users

What?

- Online, self-administered survey

How?

- Students 18-24 years at a large urban university (N=1,322)
- Online, self-administered survey

Results

Characteristics of Sample Participants (n=161)

- Female: 111
- Tinder app use: 75
- Relationships: 54
- Friends: 48
- Sex: 32
- Sex with another app user: 32
- Oral sex: 26
- Vaginal sex: 20

Perceptions of Physical Harm and Behaviors

The app indicates that you have shared contacts with the person you matched with. How likely are you to trust this person will not physically harm you?

- 67% perceived physical harm

The app indicates that you DO NOT have shared contacts with the person you matched with. How likely are you to trust this person will not physically harm you?

- 42% engaged in sex*
- 29% had condomless sex**

*At first offline encounter with another app user
** At first sex encounter with another app user

Conclusions

- Mobile app users expressed safety concerns to e-dating scenarios regarding offline meetings with potential dates
- Although participants had safety concerns, more than a third of the respondents engaged in sexual activity early in offline encounters
- Casual sex encounters with people met on an app may increase risk of physical and sexual violence
- Findings suggest that the mobile app’s social features may change how perceived harm affects sexual risk behaviors

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